

CITYtheology

THE MAGAZINE OF THE LEEDS CHURCH INSTITUTE

**HOW DOES FAITH IMPACT
OUR RESPONSE TO
CLIMATE CHANGE?**

**WHAT PUTS
THE WARMTH
INTO WARM
SPACES?**

**HOW CAN WE REACH OUT
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**STANDING AT THE
DAWN OF SUNDAY
ACCOMPANIED BY
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WHAT PUTS THE WARMTH INTO WARM SPACES?



Paul Coleman, Faith at the Margins Lead at Leeds Church Institute, reflects theologically on the offer and experience of Warm Spaces in Leeds churches.

The Cost of Living crisis has hit hardest the 175,000 people in Leeds who were recorded as living in poverty even before the crisis began.

There has been a range of statutory, third sector and faith sector responses to this, including the much talked about Warm Spaces initiatives where funding is assigned to help meet the additional costs of opening community spaces and making them a welcoming and supportive environment. Leeds City Council has assigned £45,000 to this and the fund is administered by Voluntary Action Leeds. Approximately half of the Warm Spaces on the Leeds City Council list are being provided by churches or church groups. So what is it that drives churches to open their doors and put the kettle on?

This article is written on the basis of conversations at Warm Spaces with attendees, church ministers, members and volunteers at twelve different locations. It is based on their accounts of hardship and struggle alongside stories of friendship and hospitality. Significantly there was widespread discomfort over the use of the term Warm Space, which was found to be off-putting due to its connotations of homelessness and poverty. Many people expressed a preference for a café that was warm and served affordable food, tea and coffee. They wished to pay something towards a drink and a sandwich but would not be able to pay the going

rate in most commercial cafés and coffee shops. By implication, the naming of the Warm Spaces initiative does not appropriately address the individual's need for dignity and autonomy.

At the different churches that run Warm Spaces, there was a shared ethos that the real warmth is more than physical. Rather, that the essential warmth is hospitality and friendship.

In unpacking this idea, people said, “It’s nice to have a catchup with friends ... I can bring my sewing”, and, “It’s better than having people round at home, someone else does the washing up!” At other times it was said, “I feel accepted and cared for, this is what church should be like”, and, “I love coming here, everyone is so friendly, and they are actually interested in me as a person and not as a problem.”

This idea of Warm Spaces as a place of community, hospitality and friendship seems to be central, and many of the better attended places appear to be those where community takes places around food and drink, whether that be a free meal or a subsidised cup of tea and slice of cake. People also appreciate the chance to play board games together or to take part in art and

craft activities, with people bringing their own games to share with others. For one attendee, this was particularly important as they had, “just moved to Leeds and this is a great way to meet people and get to know what’s going on.” This means that both volunteers and guests are engaging in warm spaces as a means of participating in some form of community.

Following the experience of lockdowns over the last few years, there is a growing desire amongst people seeking to reconnect with others, and to regain a sense of social belonging and purpose, making a positive contribution to the lives of those around them. Warm Spaces go some way towards enabling this reconnection.

When churches provide these Warm Spaces, they become places of encounter, both in terms of relational encounter between individuals and communities and also of spiritual encounter where people search for meaning and purpose in life.

There were spontaneous discussions on spirituality and even requests for prayer. In these discussions, people were not looking to be told an answer, but rather they were taking the opportunity to explore shared values including community and care for the environment.

This increasing interest in, and hunger for, spirituality was evident during the pandemic when it was largely taking place outside institutional religion. A way of understanding this is the concept of Anatheism developed by Richard Kearney. He speaks of a new search for God that follows on from a rejection of God.

Anatheism is about people having said goodbye to a traditionally envisaged belief in God, who is authoritarian and institutional, and are experiencing the need to find an understanding of God that makes sense in the world as we live in it today.

This leads to the question, how is the Church responding to and engaging with this search for authenticity and re-enchantment. In Leeds we can see that providing physically, socially and spiritually warm places that are supported by Leeds City Council and the third sector is in fact a key part of the response.

The involvement of churches across Leeds in the Warm Spaces initiative is an example of collaboration with voluntary organisations and the Local Authority enabling the Church to re-engage with wider society. It is reflective of a national trend seen during the pandemic as recorded in the *Keeping the Faith* research

undertaken by Prof Chris Baker. In this research, the characteristics of good partnership working between local authorities and faith groups were identified as, “developing trust; cultivating transparency; sharing values, ethos and motivation; embracing new mindsets that includes re-imagining the structures of governance and finance; addressing conflict and misunderstanding; regular communication; developing shared goals based on shared values and action plans; telling good stories, and celebrating achievements.”

Churches and local councils in Leeds, as well as elsewhere in the UK, are connecting through the Warm Spaces initiatives over their shared values, with outcomes being judged in terms of, “kindness, empathy, compassion, motivation, hope and friendship”. The relationships between the local authorities and faith groups, and between the faith groups and their local communities are increasingly being defined in terms of a relational understanding of what it means to be human.

It might be that in Leeds, religious identities and secular identities are becoming more porous, as concerns over food poverty, social isolation and climate change, provide a common ground for shared conversation and action.

Would this have been possible if not for the cooperation between Leeds City Council, the third sector and the faith sector during the pandemic in response to urgent needs around hunger, isolation and digital exclusion? The development of faiths as a recognisably growing force for good in society had been hoped for and worked for prior to the pandemic, and this has come to fruition. As Chris Baker expressed a common attitude to faith groups, the prevailing attitude is, “I’m not really interested in what people say they believe. I’m much more interested in how they live out what they say they believe.”

All over our city, the lived out faith of Christians and churches helps to invite the ‘warmth’ into Warm Spaces.



To listen to the Hook Lecture 2022 referred to in this article when Professor Chris Baker spoke on “Partnerships for Real Change: harnessing political and spiritual yearning in an age of uncertainty”, please visit our YouTube channel (Leeds Church Institute, LCI) or email Paul to request a copy of the transcript on margins@leedschurchinstitute.org



HOW CAN WE REACH OUT THE HAND OF FRIENDSHIP? WHEN SHARING OUR FOOD AND FAITH WITH OTHERS, THE MYTH OF SCARCITY IS CHALLENGED.

Freda Shaffi, food blogger and artist, in conversation with Bronagh Daly, Faith and Creativity Lead at LCI, reflects on food faith and unity.

Society has bought into the myth of scarcity, believing that there just isn't enough food and resources around to meet people's needs. This myth can lead to defensive and competitive behaviours. How different this is to the ways in which faith communities respond to a lack of base ingredients to feed both the body and the soul. Freda's mother remembers the scarcity of herbs when she arrived in England in the 1960s. In response, she grew vegetables and herbs alongside her Sikh and Hindu neighbours to create wholesome dhal to feed the family and friends. From scarcity to abundance, these women of faith cooked together and developed a culture of encounter that spanned their religious differences.

In Leeds today, there are so many stories of sharing food, such as the Pitta Mela at the Shantona Women's Centre, the Lenten soup bags at Our Lady of Kirkstall Live Simply group or the ingredients of the Passover seder plate. Such sharing connects with the vision of Pope Francis' 2021 encyclical 'Fratelli Tutti', wherein he wrote that creating a culture of encounter begins with the realisation that we are all in the same boat. Through care for creation alongside care for one another, we become more open to our interconnectedness.

Together we challenge the myth of scarcity when we share and provide for each other.

Freda has expressed the friendship in such food, faith and unity by choosing to display two pieces of art alongside each other at Leeds Church Institute this month, as shown here. The sketch of herbs growing in the allotment and photograph of her mother's hands pictured holding the coriander dhal, invite us to listen closer and more gently to the sacred words, 'Fruit of the earth and work of human hands'. We are encouraged to reflect on an integral ecology, the connection between humanity and the environment present in our everyday encounters with nature and one another.



TREASURE HUNT, GUEST, STRANGER, LISTENER: WHAT COMES TO MIND WHEN YOU HEAR THE WORD 'MISSION'?

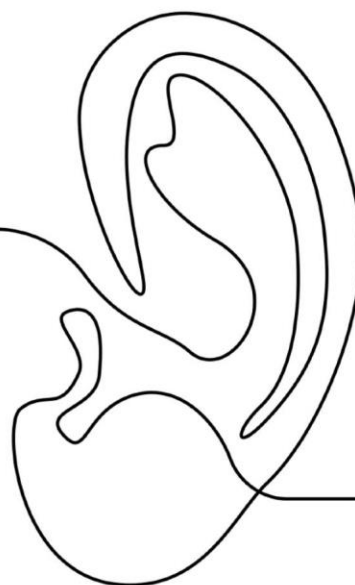
Ann Nicholl, member of Leeds Church Institute Council and Lay Reader at All Souls, Blackman Lane, reflects on her learning journey with Experiments in Mission.

For many people in the church today, 'mission' is up there with that other scary word 'evangelism' as something we know we should do but are perhaps a little wary of and might struggle to define succinctly. We know the theory, that mission begins and flows from God; and that we are invited to join in and to be changed through our participation. But what does that look like in Leeds? And even more particularly, what does it look like in areas of Leeds facing multiple social and economic challenges?

Experiments in Mission was a seven-session course hosted at LCI, that drew together a group of eight people working in different contexts of social and economic challenges. Together we looked at and discussed recent scholarship on mission and marginalisation, and thought about how theology and theories applied in different situations applied to our unique context. The meetings were a month apart, so between meetings we had time to experiment with the ideas we had discussed, then reflect back to the group how things had progressed. For example, we considered how taking a proactive approach to equality, diversity and inclusion would impact our mission. This involved us launching new and less comfortable strategies, when the support of the group was vital.

The time spent together was challenging as it involved demanding theological exploration and deep discussion, but also times of prayer and reflection. In our sharing, we used art and images as well as words and explanations which deepened and enriched our understanding of mission. One participant commented:

The course enabled me to widen my understanding of mission particularly in the fact that it should be based around listening to the needs of those in need rather than impressing on the local community the values and desires of the institutions.



When we look at the example of Jesus, we see that time and again, Jesus first listened to people's stories and cared for their needs, before speaking to them of God's love. Whether this was with the feeding of the 5,000, the healing of the Centurion's daughter, or even when turning water into wine, Jesus began by listening to the needs of those who came to him. This deliberate listening to the voices of the local community, followed by a time of prayerful discernment and sharing with others, is central in enabling churches and individuals to focus their limited time and energy on the areas in which God is already at work.

In an ecumenical group, people come with differing vocabularies for talking about mission and different denominational strategies for implementation. At the end of the course, though, one participant noted:

while the normative and espoused theological understandings of mission had some clear differences based on denominational traditions and personal background, the actual work of mission on the ground was in many ways very similar.

So, if the question is, 'How do we carry out the Mission of the Church where we are?', then central to the answer is inspiration from Jesus' example, sharing learning and theological reflection with others in mission, as well as listening and building relationships with people living at the margins.

HOW DOES FAITH IMPACT OUR RESPONSE TO CLIMATE CHANGE?



Anna Bland, Team Leader of Leeds Sanctuary, shares personal reflections on her faith journey through hope and despair.

Since a young age, I have had an awareness of climate change as my mum was a supporter of Friends of the Earth for as long as I can remember. The magazines were always in the upstairs bathroom. She was an eco warrior before anyone knew what one was.

I have been anxious and concerned for our planet's future for as long as I can remember and the emotions connected to that have varied over time. There have been times when I have felt hopeless and lost, times when I have felt fired up and times when I have retreated completely from the issue as it just feels too big and too scary.

This has run alongside an increasing love of being outdoors in green spaces and interest in wildlife. I have become so aware of the benefits to me personally of being outdoors and feel connected to what is sometimes called the natural world. I see God's beauty reflected in the trees, the birds and the flowers. My morning is always made when I spot the dart of a blue and gold kingfisher when out by the river. These for me are what mystics refer to as thin spaces and thin moments. I feel the presence of God.

But how can I remain hopeful with the bleak future I see ahead? Where can the hopeful message of Jesus be seen in this mess we find ourselves in as a planet?

I am ever hopeful in humanity because God became human and walked among us.

For many years it felt no one was taking notice but thanks to modern day saints like David Attenborough and Greta Thunberg so many people care passionately about climate change, and this gives me hope.

I see God in action in the climate movement, both where God is expressed openly and where she is not.

Being part of a craftivist group gives me hope because we are passionate climate activists working together. Month by month we put pressure on Leeds City Council, the national government and businesses to take seriously their commitment to biodiversity, future generations and the many people in our world today suffering from the impacts of our changing climate already. I see God in the sparks of creativity and drive for change. We are a people of hope.

My hope for the future of the planet and my trust in God is expressed in a version of the Lord's Prayer included in the Creation Care Prayers commended by the Church of England. I love to pray this prayer:

Our Father, who art in heaven

Hallowed be Your name

Your kingdom come

Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven

Give us this day our daily bread

Forgive us our trespasses

As we forgive those who trespass against us

Lead us not into temptation

And deliver us from evil

For Yours is the Kingdom

The Power and the Glory

For ever and ever

Amen.

You are also at home in the air,
the soil, the forests and the oceans,
by the care we take of your creation,
all that you see is good,
Your will to till and care,
that all may have sufficient to live life
in fullness,
our greed, our exploitation, our lack of
concern for other species and for future
generations
by reconciliation with justice and
peace,
the temptation to equate dominion
with exploitation,
the evil of destroying your gift of
creation,
Yours Lord, not ours,
in the cross and the resurrection,
You were the beginning and you are
the end.
And so be it.





LIGHTS ON, CHAIRS OUT, MICROPHONES ON – WE ARE NOT DONE YET

By **Dwayne Hutchinson**, Faith and Racial Justice Lead, reflecting on the event Knowing the Ground: Care, Public Safety and Policing the Inner City.

Keep the lights on

It is not time to rest

Keep the lights on

The police have broken the community's trust

Keep the lights on

Stop and Search statistics are disproportionate

Keep the chairs out

The conversations have not finished

Keep the chairs out

The guests are grabbing a quick bite to eat from the caterers

Keep the chairs out

They are returning to their seats, to eat their food, talk and sip their drinks

Keep the chairs out

It is only 7:30pm, why are the chairs being packed away?

Keep the chairs out

The guests would like to sit down

Keep the chairs out

They are deep in conversation

Keep the chairs out

We still have an hour to go before we finish

Keep the microphones on

We have singers and musicians performing

Keep the microphones on

They are singing and playing harmoniously

Keep the microphones on

The guest panel are answering our questions

Keep the microphones on

The poets are speaking to the room

Keep the microphones on

The community voices are speaking and they need to be heard

Keep the microphones on

We are making progress

Keep the microphones on

We still have time to talk

Keep the lights on

Why are some of the lights switched off?

Keep the lights on

The automatic timers for the lights were not adjusted to cater for the event

Keep the lights on

We are still here

Keep the lights on

We are not finished yet

Keep the lights on

We still have more than thirty minutes to go

Lights partially off, Chairs partly packed up, Microphones on

But we agreed the finishing time was 8:30pm

Lights partially off, Chairs packed up, Microphones off

It is only 7:50pm, what is happening?

Gates Closed, Doors Locked, Venue emptied

It is only 8pm!

Goodbye, See you later, Take care

We have been wrongfully treated and dismissed

Goodbye, See you later, Take care

This was not our agreement

Taxis leave, Cars depart, People walk home

Injustice and disservice was served by the Venue

But still rejoice, still smile, still wave and say farewell

We still made progress through it all

Lights On, Chairs out, Microphones on

There are still issues to be resolved between the Community and Institutions

Lights On, Chairs out, Microphones on

There is more work to be done

STANDING AT THE DAWN OF SUNDAY ACCOMPANIED BY JESUS OUR FRIEND

Dr Helen Reid, Director of Leeds Church Institute, reflects on a theology of safety with God for those who have experienced trauma.

The suffering that follows trauma remains with us. Wounds that have been experienced as a result of war, abuse or violence, are an undeniable part of one's personal history but can also be the focus for healing. At the heart of a recent book *Dawn of Sunday*, written in the context of the Church's ministry of healing, the authors recapitulate the first Easter morning to speak

powerfully into the situation of those who have experienced trauma.

As Jesus steps from the grave at the exact point of resurrection, captured here by Piero della Francesca, there is a moment when one foot is in the grave and one foot in the garden.



Resurrection by Piero della
Francesca, San Sepolcro, Tuscany.

*... He pauses, gathering the strength in his flat foot...
Contained, exhausted, hungry, death running off his limbs ...
We wait ... for his spring.*

Extract from "Resurrection: Borgo San Sepolcro" by Rowan Williams from the collection *Headwaters* (Perpetua Press, 2008)

On the dawn of that first Easter Sunday Jesus steps into light and life. As with those who have experienced trauma, one foot is in the past trauma which does not let go, and one foot steps forward to healing and wholeness. It is rare that anyone who has experienced severe trauma comes to a point where it is as if the trauma never happened.

And so, healing does not bring the story of trauma to a close, but leads people on a journey into a healthy, wholeness of life.

It can be seen, therefore, that the process of healing is complex and on-going. There is a clear role for therapies based on the treatment of PTSD, counselling and the field of psychotraumatology. Also, Christians have distinctive grounds for hope and healing. As people of faith, we can be wary of treading the path of a purely secular-based treatment if we have been encouraged to pray for healing 'in faith'. Yet there is also a contrary vulnerability in the implication that, if we are not 'visibly' or 'fully' healed, then our faith has not been sufficient. An integrated understanding of healing might wish to say that God's healing power is not jealous or exclusive but rather is un-possessive and un-controlling. That, therefore, as people of faith, we are free to embrace healing through faith and secular approaches combined.

The experience of trauma can isolate us from other people and deny us friendship. As we reflect on Holy Week, we are reminded that Jesus knows what it is to be isolated, to experience pain and trauma to the point of death. As the authors of *Dawn of Sunday* wrote, 'In Jesus, we can be sure that God himself knows what it is like to be human in a traumatic world'.

More than this, Jesus who suffered, is also the one who promised to call us not servants but friends, and invites us to abide with him (John 15). Abiding in Jesus allows us to experience being safely loved by God in the context of an intimate, personal and healing relationship. Through Jesus, we know that we are united with God, and have dignity and worth, so we can form wholesome friendships with others, establishing safe boundaries.

This can include therapeutic alliances: Jesus is the perfect model of a friend in therapeutic alliance, an internal friend who dwells in you. This brings a deep sense of safety and the potential to perceive the world differently because of friendship with Christ. The church has a role in healing from trauma because all members of the Christian church are resourced by God the Trinity to form a community that is trauma safe. This happens when in friendship, as shared

between us and with Jesus, we embrace the diversity of our group in its beauty and brokenness. As the authors write:

Jesus is our friend after trauma. He safely loves us, empowers us for the creation of safe boundaries within himself and others, and restores our sense of big picture safety.... Jesus is God's offer to be our unfailing friend in the context of a healing relationship that aids safe trauma recovery.

Recommended reading:

Dawn of Sunday: The Trinity and Trauma-Safe Churches by Cockayne, Harrower and Hill (Cascade Books, 2022). Leeds Church Institute hosted a three session Reading Group for Dawn of Sunday, and further resources on this are to be found on our website

When did we see you naked? edited by Reeves, Tombs and Figuera (SCM Press, 2022).

WHAT DO YOU THINK?

Helen Reid, Director of Leeds Church Institute, asks for feedback on CITYtheology

Leeds Church Institute has been producing CITYtheology for eight years with the aim of stimulating theological thinking on issues affecting Leeds. It seeks to resource diverse Christians in their engagement with city life as we live faithfully, seeking justice and living relationally.

CITYtheology is a platform for local voices and includes a wide range of contributors. Contributors are encouraged to address questions rather than provide answers, to apply their thinking and learning directly to Leeds, and aim to inspire and resource readers to reflect and act. This means when you read it, you are part of a wider community with a commitment to 'learning for a faithful city'.

It is helpful when we hear from readers about articles or the magazine as a whole, and proposals for articles are also welcomed. Please do send in feedback or ideas to director@leedschurchinstitute.org. I would be delighted to hear from you.



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Mother Hands with Coriander Dhal and Mother's Allotment Sketch
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